

Blissful innocence

The rock allured all people to 11 Glovers Lane. Whether they were inhabitants of the home, neighbors, or strangers passing by, the rock caught everyone's attention. The massive stone sat on the grass in solitude, as if its presence intimidated any other minor structures. The rock was three feet tall but felt much bigger to the children, who idolized the rock, as it was their prized possession.

The air of the backyard always tasted so sweet and crisp, with constant sunlight sparkling down on everyone. Oliver made it to the rock first, which was no surprise to Cleo and Will. Cleo helped Will mount the rock. Once Will plopped down on the rock, Cleo mounted. The rock felt cold on Cleo's blue jeans, as she glided her fingers through the slippery moss. Will and Oliver stood at the top of the rock, while Cleo sat to the side until Oliver cracked a joke about how she was a baby for not coming up. Within moments, Cleo was on top of the rock. The children began to jump off of the rock, their usual source of fun. The cycle would last for at least an hour; they would each mount the rock, climb to the top, then see who could jump the furthest. Laughter crowded the air, and the children's smiles gave an unexplainable sense of life to the rock. However, the children had yet to understand that those smiles wouldn't last forever.

As Will's feet catapulted off of the rock, his limbs moved spastically in the air, quickly landing on the rough, dark, grass. The harsh thump waned the rock's gleam. Its warm light grey color turned to a dark, uninviting shade of grey, ridding it of its unique liveliness. Will sat sobbing on the coarse grass, while Cleo yelled for her mother. The minor bloody scratches on Will's leg sent the children into an immediate panic. No one ever fell off of the rock. The rock was always meant to protect the children, harboring them into the wonderland of purity: 11 Glovers Lane.

The glistening bright blue color of Oliver's eyes turned to a deep black color, dangerous for its unprecedented transformation. Cleo's compelling hazel eyes turned to a gloomy dark brown, engrossed by melancholy. Although a dark void consumed the children's eyes, a small spark of life seemed to reemerge. However, it was a distressed spark, for the children didn't know it yet, but the void would slowly be filled with change. The sun faded away, and a harsh wind came upon the house. As the cold ripples swirled around Oliver's face, he felt his body being pushed and then controlled by the wind. As his stationary body jerked around, he felt a strong, unwelcoming feeling, an unprecedented feeling that he could not explain.

Oliver's frogs were his prized possessions. The way they gracefully jumped around in their tank amazed Oliver as the reflection of his deep blue eyes powered the frog's vitality. Since the day Oliver bought the frogs, he immediately cherished them. For his sixth birthday, the family made a trip to the local pet store where his mother said he could choose "whatever pet he wanted" which meant any animal besides a cat, bunny, or gerbil. So, as they walked into the Petco in the Trumbull Mall on that joyous Saturday afternoon, Oliver trotted right over to the frogs. No one knew why the frogs caught his attention. They were not as popular as the puppies or hamsters that all the other children gazed at with excitement. But to Oliver, they were wonderful. He chose one frog that was jumping around frantically like it just ate a hot pepper and another that was sitting peacefully on a plastic structure. The worker placed the two in a separate tank for Oliver and explained to Oliver the proper care and maintenance he must attend to them. Oliver tried very hard to pay attention, although his youthful excitement hindered his ability to comprehend the knowledge shared with him. In the car ride back, Oliver could not stop talking about the frogs. This was sort of a surprise for the family, as Oliver was rather quiet, always

having more of a gentle and composed voice. After much debate over the names of his frogs, he decided to name them Luke and Henry.

The drive home from school that day felt peculiar to Cleo and Will. An obscure feeling of uneasiness spread throughout the large suburban. Their mother was quiet, too quiet. Oliver was staring out the window, indulging in his usual observatory counting games. Cleo sat motionless in her seat not knowing what to do. She hated quietness. Her seatbelt wrapped tight around her waist, trapping her into the frightening unknown. It started to rain. Cleo fixated on the sound of the pounding rain, intensifying her anticipation. The droplets crashed onto the ground at the speed of lightning. They were far too beyond grasp, crashing before her own eyes. As the harsh rain droplets merged into thick sheets of forceful and perilous water, Cleo gave a sharp glance to Oliver and her mother. They did not seem fazed by the seemingly lethal rain or the perpetual silence that had taken control over the car. They seemed relaxed, rather entranced by the oddity of their surroundings. Oliver's body was sprawled into a comfortable position with his hands on the window, outlining his name with his fingers. The mother calmly drove through the difficult conditions with ease. Cleo was perplexed about why no one had commented on the everlasting silence. She looked out the window, observing the houses they drove by. *A family with two boys and one girl lives in that house Cleo thought to herself. And the girl picks those daisies and the boys play baseball in the yard.* She then passed by this one house that she particularly admired for its simplicity. It was an average-sized red pastel house with white tulips surrounding the *white* picket fence. It had a certain appeal to it that Cleo loved. It was bright and cheerful, as she assumed the inhabitants were as well. As her mother pulled over to answer a phone call, Cleo observed the children playing outside. The pounding rain had just come to a stop, as the children

jumped and splashed around in puddles. Cleo could hear the laughter of the three young children from inside the car, as she watched in awe, easing her anxious state. She was comforted by the free-spirited, happy children. The brothers chased the young girl around attempting to drench her in buckets of murky rainwater. The young girl surprisingly seemed to enjoy being chased, as her sweet shrieks illuminated the grey sky.

Cleo turned her eyes towards the *white* picket fence. She observed the brightly shining paint and how each pillar was perfectly shaped and evenly spaced next to each other. The fence emitted a jubilant radiance as its simplistic structure merely added to its beauty. However, Cleo's dazed thoughts suddenly halted. A tall woman wearing a long army green parka emerged from the house, her face tightly scrunched, her eyes dead set on the children. Cleo tried to figure out what she was saying, but she soon figured it wasn't anything good, as the children distressingly marched into the house. Just like that, with a blink of an eye, the children's joy had diminished into the dark sky, forming gloomy clouds. As Cleo glanced again at the fence, she noticed it had lost its shine, which made her angry. The cheerful *white* pillars had transformed into dark shades of dull brown. A multitude of thoughts crowded her head: *Have they always been brown? Why did I see them as white? A fence can't change colors. That's impossible. Why did I see them as white? Am I losing my mind? I must be. No. But it was white... or at least I thought it was?* Her muddled thoughts only made her angrier. She felt as if she was swarmed by a colony of buzzing bees, trapping her into a state of helpless rage, while sucking any sense of clarity and stability out of her. *Why couldn't the children play outside forever? Why was their mother so angry? Why is the fence brown? Why was the fence white? Was the fence ever white?* She looked again at the fence. It was brown. Dark brown. Cleo then felt an urge of relief, as her mother got off of the

phone and they drove away from the house. Away from the dirty, dark, and dangerous brown colored fence.

The three children embarked on another one of their journeys, but this time, to the treehouse. The decaying, disgusting treehouse meant the world to the children. It was like a magical castle to them, sprinkled with many wonders. As they climbed up the unstable ladder, the three sat contemplating what to do next.

“Oh, no!” said Cleo.

“What?” said Oliver.

“The walls are so gross, we need to clean!” responded Cleo.

“Yes, clean, clean clean!” added Will.

Cleo reached over to grab the blue bottle of Windex and the dusty roll of paper towels. She began to squirt the interior wooden walls with the blue liquid.

“Let me help! Let me help!” exclaimed Will.

“Okay, okay, calm down. You can help,” said Cleo.

She tossed a paper towel to Will, and the two of them ferociously wiped the walls.

“Let’s play Backyardigans! Let’s play Backyardigans!” screamed Will.

“No, Will, that’s too babyish,” said Oliver.

“No, it’s not Oliver, pleaseeee,” said Will.

“No, wait, let’s go check on the frogs!” exclaimed Oliver.

Cleo’s face scrunched with confusion, as Oliver never let his siblings near his frogs. He would always say that they were his, not theirs. She quickly jolted a response, not giving any time for him to change his mind.

“Yeah. C’mon Will, let’s go!”

As they walked inside, they passed their mother preparing dinner.

Cleo's body anticipated with excitement, as they walked up to Oliver's room. When they got to the tank, Cleo felt a strong, quite odd feeling arise from the water. The blue water had turned into a light brown color diffused with unknown particles. Oliver's eyes changed from their usual bright blue to a deep, dark brown color, which made Cleo anxious. She examined the tank, then she saw. The two small frogs were floating on top of the water. They lacked all the qualities that Oliver loved about them. The way they jumped around in their tank; the way they could do nothing while doing everything. A waterfall of tears drowned Oliver's face as he stood next to the tank.

"They could just be sleeping!" said Will, in a hopeful voice.

He was too young to understand. Or maybe it was that he couldn't understand the sadness that had taken control of his beloved brother.

"No," said Oliver. "They're dead. They will never come back. They're gone forever".

"O-o ah-a I go get mom..." Will said hesitantly.

As Will left the room, Cleo sat on Oliver's bed.

"Oliver, I am so sorry. It's going to be okay. Everything will be okay", said Cleo.

Oliver did not respond, rather he sat next silently next to the tank. Cleo didn't know what to do. She stretched her short arms around him, embracing him with a loving hug. But she knew that wasn't enough. Cleo felt powerless in these moments of despair. She knew deep inside that nothing she could say or do would bring the creatures back to life, but she held onto every glimmer of hope she had.

The rest of the night felt never-ending to Cleo. Upon hearing the sad news, the mother tried to cheer Oliver up, by making the children's classic favorite dinner; dino nuggets and mac

and cheese. While Cleo and Will devoured their meal in the course of a few minutes, Oliver's fork had yet to enter his mouth. Cleo tried to make conversation among the table, but Oliver did not engage.

"We can always get fish!", said Will in a cheerful voice, unable to understand the seriousness and complexity of the situation.

"It wouldn't be the same", responded Oliver, in a monotone voice.

It was as if a part of Oliver had vanished with the frogs. He was always calm, composed. But without his frogs, that small part of him was lost too, which caused him to break.

"Will, sweetie, that's very thoughtful of you," said the mother, attempting to lighten the mood.

Oliver's face flooded with tears, which traveled through the entire house. His face turned to a deep red as he released a rainstorm of tears. Cleo and Will were shocked, as they had never seen their brother cry. The mother embraced him in a warm hug, which seemed to put him at some sort of ease. Cleo watched their interaction, trying to figure out what she could do to help, but again she realized there was nothing she could do. It was weird to see Oliver like this. In that specific moment, he wasn't quiet, which caused Cleo to realize that he was so much more. *Why did his frogs have to die? Would they ever come back? It's not fair.... Why them? Why Oliver?*

The cool breeze swirled around the three children as they sat on the soft, mellow grass. Will began to pick at the beaming yellow dandelions, blowing the plushy petals into the wind. One after another he made his wishes, his unfazed eyes entranced by the breeze that captured each one of his enchanting desires. Cleo nervously picked at a grass patch, when she felt a displeasing feeling engross her. Her body began to lightly shake, as her hands firmly gripped the

green grass. She looked at her two brothers peacefully relaxing. Her head twirled in circles as she glanced back and forth between her brothers and the pond. An army of mysterious lily pads crowded the pond, topped with bright tangible fuchsia flowers, poisonous for their beauty. The longer Cleo looked at the water, the darker it became, as the small ripples slowly enlarged, as if they were forming a tsunami that would devour the neighborhood. The robotic gazes on her brothers' faces as they watched the water dithered Cleo's feelings. She watched with fear as their bodies relaxed into a serene state. Oliver's eyes were slowly becoming darker, losing an element of their bright blue hue every few minutes. The tsunamis seemed to come closer and closer, triggering Cleo's chain of worried thoughts, seeping into her usual anxious mind.

"Can we please keep scootering, I am now weally weally bored," said Will.

The sound of Will's voice immediately gave Cleo a bit of ease, as she quickly responded.

"Okay, fine. If you want to we can I guess," said Cleo trying to cover up her anxious state.

"You guys go back to the house. I'll meet you guys there," said Oliver.

"Okay, see you soon," said Cleo in a nervous tone.

As Cleo and Will scootered off up the treacherous hill back to the house, Oliver remained seated in his peaceful trance. He looked at the numerous lily pads on the pond, searching for frogs. That's when he saw a dark green blob hopping around on the lily pads. He pictured Luke and Henry in their tanks, hopping around so excitedly, full of life. He felt a rush of happiness watching the frog gracefully leap among the lily pads, so composed, so quiet, yet full of life. He watched the frog in awe for the next five minutes before deciding that he must capture it. He got up from his relaxed trance and walked towards the water, taking two cautious steps in.

"Come here frog! Come! I won't hurt you," he said in a gentle tone.

The water felt cold on his small legs as he waddled around, deciphering how he would capture it. He took one more big step. As he pushed his feet up from the ground his whole body submerged into the water, only his flailing arms and head above the surface. He frantically floundered in the water before he went under, then up, then under again. He managed to get a few loud shrieks out, bringing Cleo and Will to the waterfront. But it was too late. By the time they got there, Oliver was at his last breath. He was fully submerged under the water, his body motionless, yet his mind still captivated by the vision of the frog. As he was underwater, he saw a glimpse of a green blob gracefully coming towards him. As his eyes slowly started to shut, he saw it. The frog. It's shimmering iridescent body swam up to his face. His flailing weak arms reached out and grabbed it. He held the frog in the depths of the water. It was at that moment he felt as if he had found what he was looking for. The pure simplistic beauty of the frog had amazed him, as he grasped onto it right before he rose to the surface of the water. Cleo and Will watched in terror. The frog leaped to a lily pad next to Oliver's floating body, then leaped towards Cleo and Will. When it approached the shallow edge of the water, the children's cries and screams were immediately silenced. Cleo bent down and looked at it. It started to excitedly croak in a peaceful melody. It hopped around with joy, then stopped. Cleo looked into its eyes. His bright blue shimmering eyes. Cleo took a deep breath, as tears washed down her face. She timidly smiled at the frog, "I love you, Oliver" she whispered as she stared into its vivid eyes. As she looked deeper into its eyes, she imagined Oliver's equable voice. "I love you too Cleo".

She silently walked back to the house with Will, paralyzed by shock and despair. She walked by the red house. The dark brown pillars of the fence shimmered in the bright sun, radiating a gleam of hope. It was a beautiful fence. Three people emerged from the house. A man and two women. They sat on the porch, laughing and talking. They weren't the same young

children she had seen before. *Where did they go?* She asked herself. As she continued to walk, she looked back at the house once more. The people were gone, vanished into the crisp, eerie air.

As they entered their driveway, Cleo looked at the rock. The sad, dark, uninviting rock. Cleo wished for the old rock. For the rock that they loved. For the rock that Oliver loved. It was gone, vanished, leaving nothing but a trail of despondency. Cleo went to sit on the rock. As she sat, the rock slowly began to come back to life. She felt a sensation of energy as if her body was being lifted by the rock. She felt a sense of security. She knew she would be okay. As the rock effulgently vibrated, Cleo smiled. She knew. It was Oliver. As she sat peacefully on the rock, a spark of energy rushed through her head. She finally realized. *The fence was brown, she* told herself. *It had always been brown.* As she got up to go inside, the rock turned dark brown again, this time surprisingly comforting her, for it gave her a sad sense of assurance. Oliver was gone. She smiled at the ravishing brown rock. “Goodbye Oliver”.